WRECK OF THE HESPERUS

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LONGFELLOW

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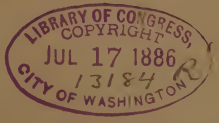
THE

WRECK OF THE HESPERUS

BY

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

ILLUSTRATED



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INTRODUCTION.

"NORMAN'S WOE" is the picturesque name of a rocky headland, reef, and islet on the coast of Massachusetts, between Gloucester and Magnolia. The special disaster in which the name originated had long been lost from memory when the poet Longfellow chose the spot as a background for his description of the "Wreck of the Hesperus," and gave it an association that it will scarcely lose while the English language endures. Nor does it matter to the legend lover that the ill-fated schooner was not "gored" by the "cruel rocks" just at this point, but nearer to the Gloucester coast.

The poet has done many things well; and he has done few things better than this ballad in the quaint, old-time style, with its nervous energy and sonorous rhythm, wherein one hears the trampling of waves and crashing of timbers.

Indeed, it is so well done, by art concealing art, that much of its force and beauty escape the careless reader; whereas, the thoughtful one finds in it an ever-increasing charm. It is worth noting that love, the usual ballad *motif*, is absent and is not missed. The almost human struggles and sufferings of the vessel, and the contrast between the daring, scornful skipper, and the gentle, devout maiden, in the midst of the terrors of storm and wreck, furnish abundant emotion and imagery; in truth, many of the lines are literally packed with color, movement, and meaning.

ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

H. Winthrop Pierce,
Edmund H. Garrett,
J. D. Woodward,
W. F. Halsall,
W. L. Taylor,
A. Buhler,
H. P. Barnes,
A. J. Lewis.

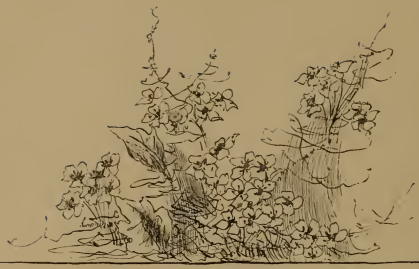
DRAWN AND ENGRAVED UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF

GEORGE T. ANDREW.

THIS EDITION OF THE WRECK OF THE HESPERUS IS PUBLISHED BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH MESSRS. HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & CO., THE AUTHORIZED PUBLISHERS OF MR. LONGFELLOW'S WORKS.

THE WRECK OF THE HESPERUS

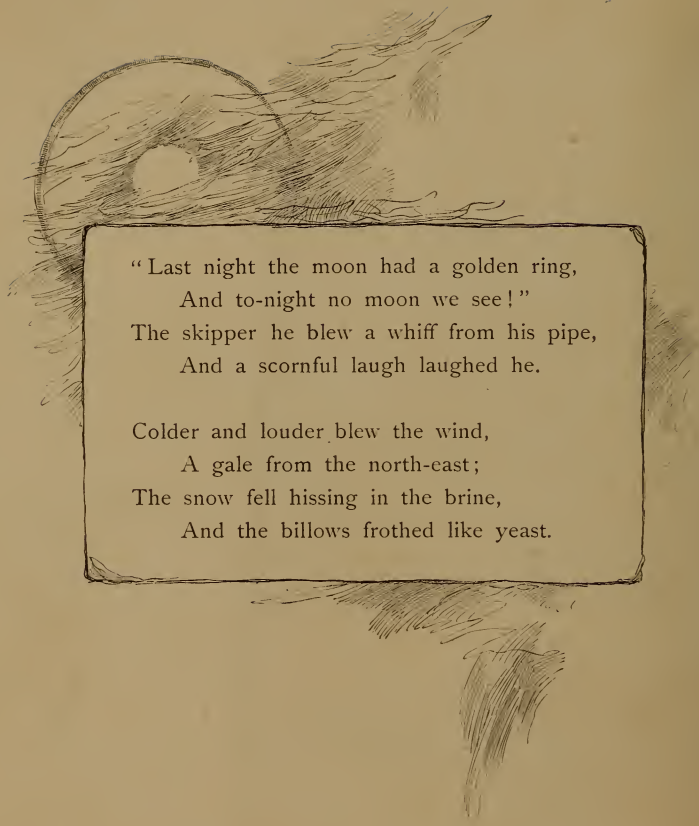
It was the schooner Hesperus
That sailed the wintry sea;
And the skipper had taken his little daughter
To bear him company.



Blue were her eyes as the fairy-flax,
Her cheeks like the dawn of day,
And her bosom white as the hawthorn buds
That ope in the month of May.

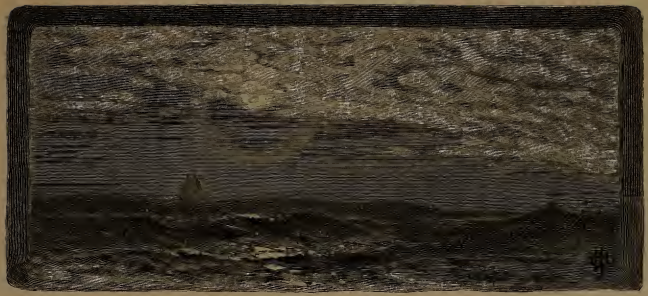
The skipper he stood beside the helm,
His pipe was in his mouth,
And he watched how the veering flaw did blow
The smoke now west, now south.

Then up and spake an old sailor,
Had sailed to the Spanish Main,
"I pray thee, put into yonder port,
For I fear a hurricane.

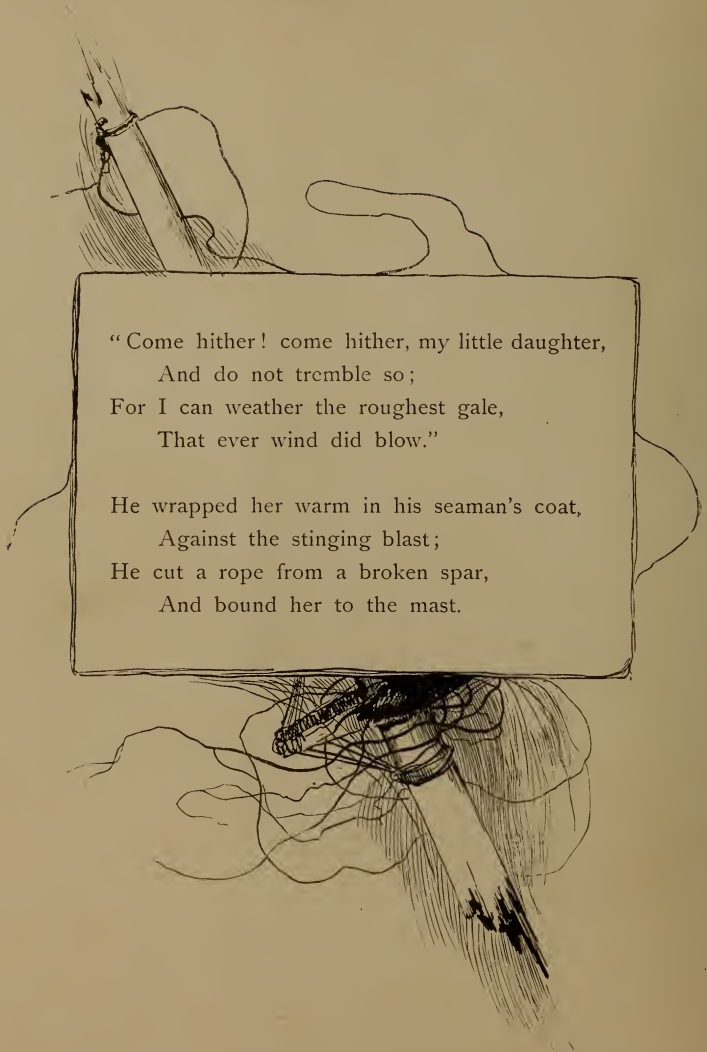


"Last night the moon had a golden ring,
And to-night no moon we see!"
The skipper he blew a whiff from his pipe,
And a scornful laugh laughed he.

Colder and louder blew the wind,
A gale from the north-east;
The snow fell hissing in the brine,
And the billows frothed like yeast.



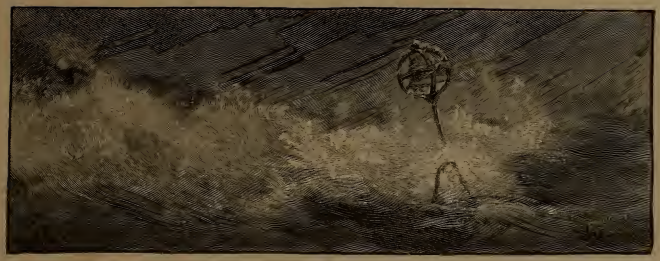
Down came the storm, and smote amain
The vessel in its strength;
She shuddered and paused, like a frighted steed,
Then leaped her cable's length.



"Come hither! come hither, my little daughter,
And do not tremble so;
For I can weather the roughest gale,
That ever wind did blow."

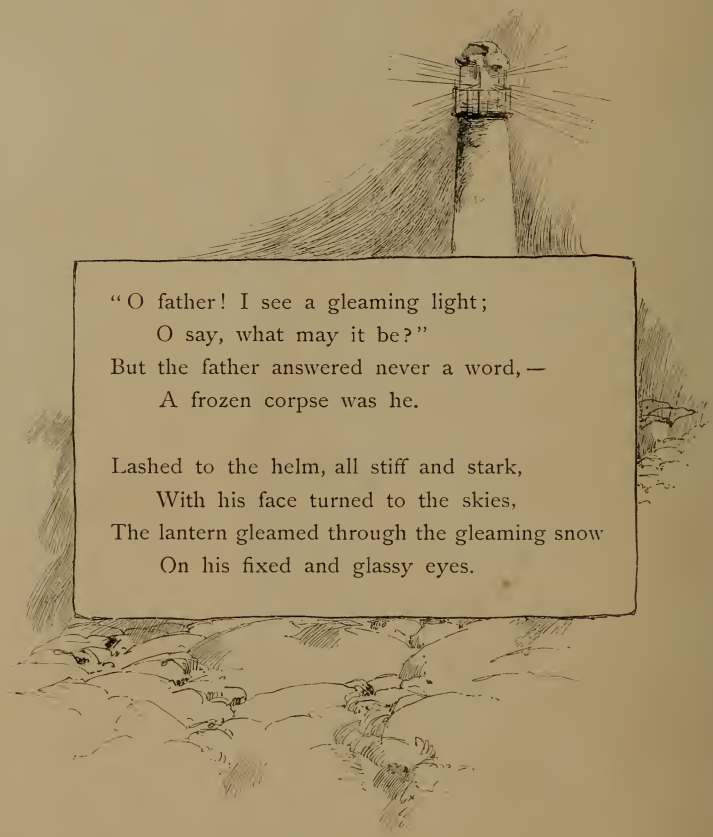
He wrapped her warm in his seaman's coat,
Against the stinging blast;
He cut a rope from a broken spar,
And bound her to the mast.

W. L. Taylor
85



"O father! I hear the church-bells ring;
O say, what may it be?" —
"'Tis a fog-bell on a rock-bound coast!" —
And he steered for the open sea.

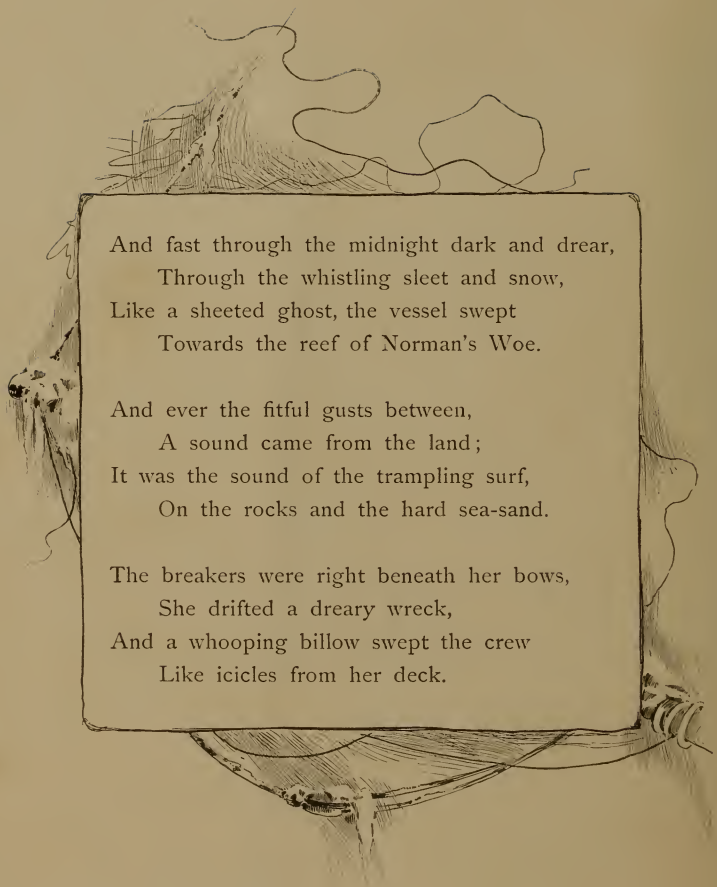
"O father! I hear the sound of guns;
O say, what may it be?" —
"Some ship in distress, that cannot live
In such an angry sea!"



"O father! I see a gleaming light;
O say, what may it be?"
But the father answered never a word,—
A frozen corpse was he.

Lashed to the helm, all stiff and stark,
With his face turned to the skies,
The lantern gleamed through the gleaming snow
On his fixed and glassy eyes.

Then the maiden clasped her hands and prayed
That savéd she might be;
And she thought of Christ, who stilled the wave,
On the Lake of Galilee.



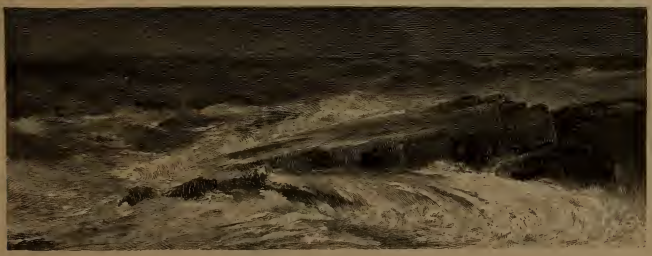
And fast through the midnight dark and drear,
Through the whistling sleet and snow,
Like a sheeted ghost, the vessel swept
Towards the reef of Norman's Woe.

And ever the fitful gusts between,
A sound came from the land;
It was the sound of the trampling surf,
On the rocks and the hard sea-sand.

The breakers were right beneath her bows,
She drifted a dreary wreck,
And a whooping billow swept the crew
Like icicles from her deck.

She struck where the white and fleecy
waves
Looked soft as carded wool;
But the cruel rocks, they gored her side
Like the horns of an angry bull.

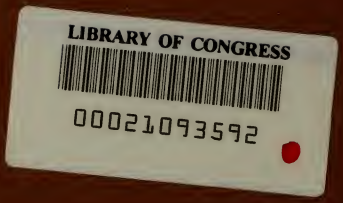
Her rattling shrouds, all sheathed in ice,
With the masts went by the board;
Like a vessel of glass, she strove and
sank,
Ho! ho! the breakers roared.



At daybreak, on the bleak sea-beach,
A fisherman stood aghast,
To see the form of a maiden fair,
Lashed close to a drifting mast.

The salt sea was frozen on her breast,
The salt tears in her eyes;
And he saw her hair, like the brown sea-weed,
On the billows fall and rise.

Such was the wreck of the Hesperus,
In the midnight and the snow!
Christ save us all from a death like this,
On the reef of Norman's Woe!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